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(1) How best to protect people's livelihoods? Comparison of LDP and DPJ manifestos

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)
July 30, 2009

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) both released their manifestos around July 29. Both parties have come up with policies covering broad-based areas, which they want to use to appeal to voters in the run-up to the general election. We have selected themes that are likely to be campaign

issues.

On major issue is which party can better point the way for emerging from the current economic crisis and for protecting the national livelihood.

Employment measures

The LDP cites its track record of implementing four economic stimulus packages over the past year. The manifesto indicates the party's stance of continuing to come up with bold stimulus packages, citing, "The party will engage in proactive public spending for the next three years." The party aims to secure 2 million jobs through seamless policy measures over the next three years, with the manifesto mentioning, "The party will realize annual economic growth of 2 PERCENT by the remaining half of fiscal 2010."

The DPJ also attaches importance to jobs. Employment opportunities are to be expanded through tax breaks for small- and medium-sized businesses and a revision to the Labor Law. Its manifesto advocates establishing a vocational training system including the provision of a monthly allowance of 100,000 yen, and raising the national average of the minimum wage to 1,000 yen.

Agricultural policy

Aside from education and child-rearing assistance measures, the LDP and the DPJ are also vying with each other over agricultural policies. The DPJ underscores that it will launch an income compensation system for farm households from fiscal 2011 that will

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cost 1 trillion yen. The LDP has also come up with a policy of supporting farm households, with one informed source stressing: "We have secured sufficient budgetary funds, including a second budget for this fiscal year. We want to improve its contents by continuing to secure necessary funds needed each year."

Pension premium records

Regarding the pension premium payment record issue, which became the bone of contention in the 2007 Upper House election, the LDP pledges to settle the issue by the end of next year, while the DPJ is set to intensively tackle the issue by characterizing its settlement as a national project. Both parties' manifestos incorporate a hike in the reimbursement of medical fees to hospitals under the medical insurance system, clarifying a stance of moving away from the Koizumi reform drive, under which social security spending was constrained.

Central and local governments

Concerning relations between the central and local governments amid prefectural governors throughout the nation increasing their identity, the DPJ pledges to switch from the current subsidy system to a lump sum money distribution system for the convenience of local governments, by reviewing the existing subsidy system. Its manifesto notes that it will revitalize local regions, by abolishing the provisional gas tax rate, etc., and making highways toll-free.

In contrast, the LDP will scrap maintenance and management expenses for government-sponsored projects shouldered by local governments. It pledges to submit a new decentralization package bill designed to take a look at the distribution of subsidies, tax allocations and tax resources. However, the manifesto does not mention specifics. Regarding the doshu regional bloc system, the manifesto notes that it will adopt the new system by 2017, by enacting a basic law by 2017. Regarding a request for the promotion of decentralization filed by the Association of Prefectural Governors, the issue that drew attention due to the LDP's attempt to field Miyazaki Governor Hideo Higashikokubaru, the party gives consideration noting that it will take it seriously and make efforts to materialize it.

Security

The DPJ's foreign relations and security pledges are noticeably

vague, compared with proposals concerning domestic politics. The only new proposal is to sign a free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S. The LDP aims to make the foreign relations and security areas a campaign issue. It is criticizing the DPJ, which opposed the anti-piracy bill, saying, "We cannot leave the security of Japan to a party that cannot consolidate the views of its party members. The LDP notes that it will take a second look at the government stance toward the right to collective self-defense.

Political reform

Political and administrative reforms are a main battle field in reform competition. The DPJ pledges to take a second look at special accounts and independent administrative agencies with the possibility of eliminating them. It will totally ban brokering amakudari golden parachute practices. It will also prohibit political funds donations by companies and organizations. Regarding restricting so-called hereditary candidates, the party will not

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allow spouses of incumbent lawmakers or their relatives within the third degree of relationship to run in the same constituencies. The manifesto notes that the number of lawmakers will be reduced by 80 by the general election after next.

The LDP proposes reducing the number of Lower House members by more than 10 percent starting from the general election after next. It will also cut the number of both Lower and Upper House members by more than 30 percent in ten years' time. Its manifesto also notes that so-called hereditary candidates will not be given endorsement or recommendations from the general election after next. However, the party has put on hold the political funds system issue, noting that it will reach a decision within a year.

(2) Will Obama come to Hiroshima? Interview with Yohei Kono

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)
July 30, 2009

-- In his speech in Prague in April, U.S. President Barack Obama declared that his administration will aim for elimination of nuclear weapons.

Kono: "It was a historic speech, wasn't it? He particularly touched on the United States' moral responsibility as the only nuclear power to have used nuclear weapons. I thought that part might have been based on the visit to Hiroshima (on Sept. 2, 2008) by U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. After all, she is a Democratic heavyweight."

-- The G-8 Speakers' Summit held last September chaired by you was what brought her there.

Kono: "Ms. Pelosi seemed stunned and deeply moved when she got a firsthand look at the reality of Hiroshima. She said to me, 'It was an extremely impressive trip. Next time, I want to come back with my family.' It was regrettable though that the news of her trip was overshadowed by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's announcement to resign that occurred around that time."

-- The next question is whether or not President Obama will visit Hiroshima.

Kono: "If he comes to Hiroshima, there is a possibility that he will feel certain that what he said was not a mistake and that the direction toward nuclear disarmament is correct, so (his visit to Hiroshima) is very important. I assume that after his Prague speech, President Obama is feeling pressure from conservative forces in the country and that European nuclear states appear somewhat icy (toward President Obama), so I'm worried that he might become isolated. He might not be able to come to Hiroshima, and I do not want to see him stop over in Hiroshima on his way to or from somewhere, which would be a halfhearted measure. For now, I am just watching how things turn out."

-- The Diet adopted a resolution on nuclear disarmament in late June. I am certain that Speaker Kono played a major role behind the

scenes.

Kono: "I am relieved and I am grateful for that. It would have been better if the Diet had adopted the resolution soon after the Obama speech. I wanted to see Japan lead the international community by clearly supporting the Obama speech and emphasizing its duty as the

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only country to have suffered an atomic attack. It was a bit regrettable that the contents were not very clear."

-- Denuclearization has been your long-cherished dream. You also played an important role in having the United Nations adopt a resolution on the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Kono: "It occurred 15 years ago soon after I became foreign minister under the then Murayama administration. The Japanese ambassador to the UN was halfhearted in deference to the United States, so I continued to encourage him not to give up. Since then, the United Nations has adopted the same resolution year after year, and there has been practically no progress in terms of contents. We must consider changing our strategy."

-- North Korea is now aiming to become a nuclear state.

Kono: "It is important to boost international opinion admonishing North Korea, but it seems impossible to change that country with pressure alone. North Korea will not be convinced unless nuclear powers begin reducing their nuclear arms first. What's more, the United States has condoned India's possession of nuclear arms, and that has ended up sending the wrong message to North Korea."

"Japan must raise an objection to such an opportunistic approach. Needless to say, the abduction issue must be addressed earnestly, but Japan, which should spearhead the drive to eliminate nuclear weapons as the only country to have suffered an atomic attack, must play a greater role in the Six-Party Talks."

-- By the way, a former administrative vice-foreign minister revealed that there was a secret pact between Japan and the United States allowing U.S. warships carrying nuclear weapons to call at ports in Okinawa. The document was reportedly destroyed. Didn't you know about it when you were serving as foreign minister?

Kono: "No, I didn't hear anything about it. So honestly speaking, I don't know."

-- Your eldest son, Taro Kono, who was chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives up until the chamber was dissolved, pressed the Foreign Ministry to disclose the existence of the secret agreement. The Democratic Party of Japan, too, has indicated that it will have (the Foreign Ministry) disclose the secret deal if it takes the reins of government.

Kono: "It is best not to have a secret pact. It is alright to examine the presence or absence of the pact, but in either case, (the pact) was reportedly inked a long time ago. There is a move to change the three non-nuclear principles by taking advantage of this occasion, which I don't like. The basic policies of Japan which cherishes peace must not be abandoned. The three principles banning weapons exports are a good example."

-- You have been a constitutional protectionist. Have you changed your view at all on the Constitution, including Article 9?

Kono: "Of course not. It is a very good Constitution."

(Interview by Yoshiyuki Wakamiya)

(3) SDF deployment on Yonaguni Island being considered; Government

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slow on border defense, should clarify stance on East China Sea

Hidemichi Katsumata

In response to a request from the local government, the Ministry of Defense has begun to consider stationing the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) on Japan's far western island of Yonaguni. In light of this, Japan needs to come up with a clear stance on its national borders.

On July 8, soon after the Air SDF (ASDF) U-4 multi-purpose support aircraft with Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada onboard on his way to an inspection tour of Yonaguni island took off from Naha Airport at 7:00 a.m., the ASDF radar on Miyako Island showed that a number of fighters took off from an air base in northern Taiwan.

The airspace over Yonaguni is adjacent to the air defense identification zone (ADIZ) between Japan and Taiwan, which serves to prevent intrusions in territorial airspace. Therefore, the ASDF, judging that Taiwanese military aircraft might scramble to intercept the U-4 carrying the minister, sent two F-15 fighters from the Naha base in haste. These fighters overtook the minister's plane, flew around Yonaguni Island, and later returned to the base after making sure that the Taiwanese aircraft did not approach the minister's plane.

A senior ASDF officer said: "This was probably an indication of their displeasure with the deployment of the SDF in Yonaguni. However, even if the minister's plane was scrambled, the government wouldn't be able to complain, since Taiwan's ADIZ is located above the island."

The town of Yonaguni has petitioned the government on modifying the ADIZ many times in the past. The demarcation of the ADIZ was set for convenience during the period of American occupation. However, the government apparently has not taken any action regarding the abnormal situation of Taiwan's ADIZ intruding upon Japan's airspace.

There are also other problems.

On July 13, the day Maritime SDF Chief of Staff Keiji Akahoshi embarked on his first visit to China, the PRC moored a large floating crane at the Shirakaba (Chunxiao in Chinese) gas field near the median line between Japan and China in the East China Sea, which the two governments had agreed to develop jointly. The PRC also moved in various equipment, which could be seen as preparations to embark on unilateral development.

This was an act that put a damper on the friendly visit, and the joint development plan has been shelved since last year's agreement. China does not recognize the median line and has been test drilling the gas fields repeatedly. Each time, the Japanese government has had to lodge a protest.

The government is conspicuously slow in responding to problems relating to the "national border" in the East China Sea. China has been sneaking in its naval vessels in the gas field area at every opportunity. In late June, five vessels passed between Miyako and the main island of Okinawa, reaching the sea areas near Japan's

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southernmost island of Okinotorishima to conduct the Chinese navy's first exercises, which included zigzag navigation. China claims that Okinotorishima is "not Japanese territory but a piece of rock."

Certainly the SDF has not been indifferent to this situation. Since the ASDF is allowed to station only one flying corps (around 20 aircraft) of F-15 fighters at the Naha base, it has been moving F-2 or F-15 units from bases on the mainland to this area for exercises on a daily basis to fill the gap in the vulnerable air defense of the Ryukyu Islands.

In order to keep the Chinese navy under surveillance, the P-3C reconnaissance planes in Naha, with the help of ASDF units on the mainland, maintain round-the-clock monitoring. Although the SDF

sends escorts from the main island of Okinawa to the sea areas near the Senkaku Islands, the Sakishima Islands, and the other remote islands, a senior MSDF officer notes that: "The Chinese navy has been very active. We do not have enough escorts for surveillance operations."

The Ground SDF (GSDF) will increase the size of its First Mixed Brigade in Naha next March and upgrade this to a full brigade (with about 2,300 troops). Still, the fact remains that there are no GSDF troops stationed in the remote islands south of the main island of Okinawa.

The ongoing study on deploying the SDF on Yonaguni Island needs to make a conclusion based on this sparse defense setup. Japan needs to come up with a clear stance on how it intends to defend its national border. There is certainly no need to feel constrained by the neighboring countries.

This is an urgent task that the next government cannot afford to neglect, whether the Liberal Democratic Party or the Democratic Party of Japan ends up taking the reins of government.

(4) Diplomacy adrift, shadow cast on Japan-U.S. relations

NIKKEI (Page 1) (Full)
July 25, 2009

Itaru Oishi, Washington Bureau chief

"I'm worried about the future of Japan-U.S. relations." So saying, former U.S. Commerce Secretary Mineta, a Japanese American of the second generation, sighed when I met him on July 13 when Prime Minister Taro Aso announced his intention to dissolve the House of Representatives.

"Is that because the Democratic Party of Japan (Minshuto) is not pro-U.S.?" I asked. Mineta shook his head. "I don't know what they want to do," he said.

Mineta experienced cabinet posts in the U.S. Democratic and Republican administrations, so a change of government, even if it happens in Japan, would not be surprising to him. "In the United States as well," Mineta said, "the ruling and opposition parties have changed places and policies in many cases like the Iraq war." The DPJ could find ways to coordinate its policy course if it is clear, Mineta said.

The U.S. Navy is now beginning to make preparations in case the

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Maritime Self-Defense Force pulls out of its refueling mission in the Indian Ocean. In the fall of the year before last, the U.S. Navy already experienced operations without Japan. A U.S. military officer flatly said, "We would appreciate it if they're around, but we won't be in trouble even if they're not."

The DPJ, now conscious of running the government after the general election, has modified its policy course, with an eye to such down-to-earth options as continuing the MSDF's fueling mission. However, the military officer looked dissatisfied, saying: "We're not happy if you come along reluctantly. Do you want to join or not?"

Even so, Washington is not necessarily satisfied with the present-day Liberal Democratic Party. It has been more than a decade since Japan and the United States agreed to relocate Futenma airfield in Okinawa Prefecture. However, Futenma airfield has yet to be relocated. "Japanese do not live up to their word." With this, a former senior State Department official, who is familiar with how the Japanese and U.S. governments negotiated over Futenma relocation, voiced this somewhat emotional criticism of Japan.

This former official went on: "They always talk about North Korea. But they shut up when it comes to specific issues, such as whether to allow us to bring nuclear weapons into Japan in the event of an emergency in the Korean Peninsula." Do nothing, decide nothing...

This is the impression of Japan.

In its postwar foreign policy, Japan could just follow Uncle Sam. A score of years has now passed since the Cold War ended. However, Japan's politicians and people are still not accustomed to think for themselves about where Japan should go. Japan remains unable to find the axis of its new diplomacy in the multipolarized world.

Recently, a note was disseminated in U.S. political circles, reading: "We don't need Canada and Japan. We also don't need Europe's participation from each country." This note was rumored to have been drafted by a high-ranking official of the Obama administration. Did the note reflect President Obama's intention of seeking to streamline such concurrent international dialogues as the Group of Eight (G-8) and the Group of Twenty (G-20)? Foreign embassies made every effort to find out where the note came from.

This year, the leaders of G-8 major nations met at L'quila in Italy. On that occasion, Obama chose China and South Africa for his summit meetings. Chinese President Hu Jintao urgently returned home, so Obama held a meeting with Brazil instead. Obama is apparently interested in newly emerging nations.

"Now we are the Group of Two (G-2)." With this, former Assistant to the President (Zbigniew) Brezinski, a heavyweight of the U.S. Democratic Party, emphasized the need for the United States and China to take the initiative to establish a world order when he attended a ceremony held this January in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China. Beijing was wary of Washington's pace. However, the advocacy of a G-2 spread like a boom in the United States, which wanted to involve China in political and economic arenas.

Within the DPJ, there are also some people distancing themselves from the United States and approaching Asia partly because of their

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rivalries with the LDP, which used to depend on the United States. However, it is unclear how the DPJ would engage China. It also looks like China is going ahead of Japan, which is apt to think of choosing either the United States or China.

In order to cope with the threat of North Korea, South Korea, at this June's summit meeting with the United States, urged Obama to reaffirm the nuclear umbrella. Japan also agreed with Assistant Secretary of State Campbell during his visit to Japan this month to discuss the nuclear umbrella.

However, Japan has a strong nuclear allergy. Tokyo therefore is reluctant to play a part in the U.S. military's nuclear strategy. For that, few people discuss how Japan, as an atomic-bombed nation, should be committed to Obama's advocacy of a "nuclear-free world."

The White House is now seriously studying whether Obama should visit Hiroshima when he visits Japan in November.

Obama's visit to Hiroshima, if it comes true, could put an end to relations between a country that won the war and a country that was defeated and could be a beginning of establishing a genuine alliance. On the other hand, it is also in danger of distorting relations since all eyes in Japan and abroad could only be riveted on the United States' responsibility as a wrongdoer that dropped the atomic bombs.

Japan, in a U.S. government source's view, may not be able to decide to accept the Hiroshima visit for fear of its risk. The new government that will come into office after the general election would have to be determined to face realpolitik in the international arena.

(5) Editorial: New era in U.S.-China relations: Japan put to test on sending out its messages

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 5) (Full)
July 30, 2009

The United States and China pledged to work together in tackling the financial crisis, climate change and such other global issues at their first "Strategic and Economic Dialogue." Rather than lamenting the possible weakening of Japan's presence, it will be better to send out Japan's messages on what it can do on these issues.

There were so many aspects that were unusual about the two-day U.S.-China dialogue held in Washington from July 27, which would make it tempting to declare the advent of a G-2 era with these two countries playing leading roles.

China sent a delegation with a record size of 150 members led by two vice premiers to Washington. The U.S. side was also represented by cabinet members in charge of foreign and economic policies.

In the speeches at the opening of the dialogue, President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Secretary of the Treasury Timothy Geithner all quoted ancient Chinese analects and sayings to emphasize the importance of the bilateral partnership.

Certain Japanese media reports claimed that President Obama stated that, "The relationship between the United States and China will shape the 21st century," and that, "The U.S.-China relationship is

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most important."

But actually, what he said was: "The relationship between the United States and China will shape the 21st century, which makes it as important as any bilateral relationship in the world."

Such meticulous wording was made out of consideration of Japan and other allies and because the President has no illusion that the United States and China will agree on every issue.

The joint statement issued after the dialogue gives a strong impression of an enumeration of issues the two sides will cooperate more closely on in the future, such as financial crisis, climate change, prevention of nuclear proliferation, and counterterrorism.

While the two countries both extol the significance of the dialogue in superlative terms, actual progress in cooperation will probably be achieved only in the future.

If these two countries which have a strong political, military, and economic presence in the world, clash, there will be no hope for the 21st Century. In that sense, we welcome the start of the dialogue.

However, we cannot help questioning the United States' apparent hesitation to express its longstanding concerns about China's military buildup and human rights issues.

U.S. criticism has served as "external pressure" for restraining China's expansion of its military power and prompting improvement of the human rights situation. It should be noted that the reformists in China also count on such "pressure."

There is concern that progress in U.S.-China relations will result in the weakening of Japan's presence. However, as President Obama said, the U.S.-China relationship involves working for common interest premised on different value systems and distrust. This is qualitatively dissimilar with the Japan-U.S. relationship.

It is rather more important for Japan to send out messages on what it can do for such issues as financial crisis, climate change, and prevention of nuclear proliferation, in order to make it imperative for the U.S. and China to develop a relationship taking account of Japan's presence.

Japan's role in the new era of U.S.-China relations should also be debated in the House of Representatives election.

(6) 2009 election for House of Representatives (Part 2): Foreign, security policies should involve all parties

Shinichi Kitaoka, professor at the University of Tokyo

China is rising rapidly, and North Korea says it is now a "nuclear power." America is in economic straits. What is Japan going to do? The time has come for Japan to be tested.

Bilateral security arrangements between Japan and the United States have been contingent on America's overwhelming power and Japan's economic power. It is of course important for Japan to strengthen

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its ties with the United States. However, Japan will now have to change its way of doing things in its relations with the United States. Japan used to put up resistance to America's requests and accept them partially. Japan should have a little more leeway to do things on its own. In addition, Japan should also study whether it will be really possible for Japan to continue its all-out dependence on America's deterrence in the future.

Japan has become caught in its own trap. For example, Japan has its self-imposed three principles on weapons exports. Japan cannot take part in the international joint production of weapons. Japan therefore can only produce weapons or buy them from the United States. This is extremely expensive. It was fine when Japan could afford to do. But Japan can no longer do that.

In addition, a principle, once created, tends to expand and stiffen in many cases. When it comes to Japan's tripartite arms embargo, some may even argue about whether it is considered "exporting" when Self-Defense Forces members to carry weapons with them when participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations. That is strange.

In politics, although no policy measures can be thoroughgoing, the opposition parties criticize the government by asking if its policy measures are thoroughgoing, and the government answers that its policy measures are thoroughgoing. That is an unwholesome argument. The ruling and opposition parties should come up with their respective plans and discuss which can better serve Japan for its national security. They have largely failed to do so. The Liberal Democratic Party and the opposition parties and the media are to blame for this.

When it comes to foreign and security policies, there are probably many people who feel the LDP is so-so and somewhat reliable, but feel uneasy about the Democratic Party of Japan. Indeed, the LDP appears to be better. However, the LDP is lacking in actual results, considering the fact that it has held the reins of government for many years. The LDP has not shown a grand design for the future.

Diplomacy is a kind of game that cannot be played with a single player. It is a common rule that the opposition parties must maintain the continuity of policies if they take the reins of government. The DPJ has also come up with even more down-to-earth proposals. DPJ President Hatoyama referred to the possibility of reviewing the government's three nonnuclear principles, which even the LDP has not discussed. I think that was an intrepid statement that faced reality. The DPJ has also accepted the Self-Defense Forces' antipiracy mission, and it looks like the DPJ will not call off the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling activities in the Indian Ocean right away.

Generally speaking, it would be better to avoid making an imprudent campaign pledge that would change Japan's foreign relations. To begin with, I want the DPJ to carefully nail down Japan's relations with other countries in the world.

Hatoyama has advocated his notion of "fraternal diplomacy," which I hope means to make proactive contributions to world peace and approve the SDF's moderate use of weapons.

Foreign and security policies should basically be suprapartisan issues. They must not be political issues. They should not say

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"we're against that because the LDP did it" or "it's outrageous for the DPJ to have changed its standpoint." Nothing is more important than the security of the people.

Japan is now in a crisis, not only in terms of its economy but also its national security. The LDP and the DPJ have the most similar policies (of all the parties). I don't think it would be bad idea for the two parties to form a grand coalition.

ZUMWALT